

THE LATE

ARTHUR MITCHELL

BY
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Fifteen years ago there were two men in the Presbyterian churches of the West who were everywhere recognized as champions of foreign missions. They held no official relation to the Presbyterian Board—they were pastors—and yet in their churches not only, but in the cities where they resided, in their respective presbyteries and synods, and throughout the West, their eloquent appeals were heard, and the influence of their facile pens was felt by thousands. They were known in mission circles as the “two Arthurs.”

Their advocacy of the great broad work of the world's evangelization was so suggestive as examples of what may be done for missions *in the pastorate*, that I feel justified in presenting them together, though one of the two is still living. Their interest did not flag when they changed their places of residence; of both the living and the dead it may be said that their missionary interest grew in strength and in far-reaching scope as the years advanced.

More than this I shall not now say of the *two*; but in speaking more particularly of the one who has received his heavenly crown, I shall only give emphasis to the lesson already indicated, namely, the important relation of the pastorate to the cause of world-wide evangelization. It has become evident as the work of missions has been enlarged and extended that the effort of the whole Church must be enlisted in it if it is to succeed.

The faith and consecration of a few missionary heroes were all-important in the early days as pioneers and exemplars, but now hundreds and thousands of laborers must be sent, if we would keep pace with the growing demands of the work. At home also it was supposed to be necessary to commission a few special agents or canvassers to collect the gifts of the churches for the advancement of the kingdom, but now the kingdom is seen to be too large for such methods. Secretaries of the right stamp are hard to find, and when found their time and strength are overtaxed by the present volume of administrative correspondence. The churches cannot afford to employ an adequate force of collectors; and even if they could, a missionary spirit in the congregations cannot be developed from without. In one emphatic word, the pastor must be the missionary advocate, and every church must be a missionary society, with its own leader. It is not a sheepfold with a flock to be simply fed; it is a regiment of Christian soldiery enlisted for conquest, and the world, near and far, is its field. In this last decade of the nineteenth century the work of foreign missions has just reached this point. Just here is pivoted the question whether it is to advance as the opening fields demand, or whether it shall sink into confessed inadequacy to accomplish what it has so conspicuously undertaken.

And we find the emphasis of the life and labor of the late Arthur

Mitchell centred around this question. As a secretary of a missionary board he was unexcelled in his earnest and eloquent pleas before the churches, but he felt more and more the inadequacy of such official appeals. What could one man do toward reaching seven thousand churches personally? And when in synods and assemblies he urged upon ministers and elders the responsible work which they alone could do, he knew from an experience of which his auditors were well aware that what he urged was not impracticable. He knew that any pastor whose own soul is enkindled with zeal for the evangelization of a lost world can enlighten the ignorance and overcome the apathy of any congregation, however ignorant or indifferent. Not necessarily can all accomplish the same degree of success that he realized, for not all are possessed of his superior and well-balanced gifts. But so much is attainable by all who are willing to try, that I am encouraged to gather up the elements of Dr. Mitchell's success, and present them as a conspicuous and valuable example to pastors.

The subject of my sketch, so widely honored and beloved, was born in August, 1835, and he died on April 24th, 1893, not having quite completed his fifty-eighth year. He had, to begin with, a goodly inheritance in his ancestry. His father, the late Matthew Mitchell, was of Quaker descent, and he well represented that gentle, charitable, and benevolent spirit by which the Quakers have been so generally characterized. The testimony of his son was that he did not remember ever to have heard from his father's lips an uncharitable remark in regard to any man. The son's early boyhood was passed at Poughkeepsie, N. Y., though he was yet a mere lad when he entered Williams College, from which he graduated before he had completed his eighteenth year. As a youth he bore a peculiarly frank and open countenance, full of the kindness and truthfulness of his nature, and sure to win at once the confidence and love of those about him. It was a case of perennial youth; for that winning and almost boyish face remained with him to the last. Although a father and a grandfather he knew neither wrinkles nor gray hairs. The dignity of years was not always accorded him by strangers on first meeting him, and ludicrous surprises were often experienced when it was learned that this dark-haired "young man" was the well-known Dr. Arthur Mitchell.

He had not always been a Christian, like those who "cannot remember when they did not love Christ." It was in college that the young student, who had been somewhat inclined to scepticism, was led to accept salvation through the sacrifice of the cross, and from that time to consecrate himself wholly to his divine Master. It was no halfway surrender. He gave his whole heart and life. He did not wait for professional preparation that he might serve God in maturer years. He rose up at once and said: "What wilt Thou have me to do?" He saw that no better field could be desired than that of his own college circle, and although he was the youngest member of his class, of small stature and boyish-looking even for his years, he went to work immediately to win souls to Christ.

He laid aside every weight ; his sensitive conscience led him to give up his Greek letter society, lest its special relationships should limit his influence with others. One's character may sometimes be older than his years. There is a dignity in deep and honest conviction, be the years many or few ; and it was so with young Mitchell. There is no other influence so great as that of personality, and here was his power. He was a successful preacher of righteousness from the start. His peculiar enthusiasm was contagious and magnetic then and forever afterward.

There could have been no better school of practical Christian life than was found in Williams College during the presidency of that distinguished man the late Mark Hopkins. On the spiritual side he was matched by his brother, Professor Albert Hopkins. And this man, who with affectionate familiarity was sometimes known as " Brother Albert," was indefatigable in his efforts as well as in his prayers for the spiritual welfare of the students. Both of these great teachers, just sufficiently differentiated, labored not only to make of their students strong men but Christian men.

Many months ago I heard the remark, quoted from a college professor, that the chief religious influence in our colleges is no longer in the hands of the instructors—it has passed to the Young Men's Christian Associations ; students are the spiritual guides of students. This state of things was regarded as having its advantages, but also some serious disadvantages. Students get nearer to each other, no doubt, and probably there was never before so much of religious life in our colleges as now ; but, on the other hand, there is a deficiency in the element of religious instruction. The chief factor in Association work is persuasion and the help of spiritual sympathy, and there is need of something more than this. It is an age of bold speculation, of uncertainty, and of more or less doubt in the minds of many educated youth. Science is now the fashion, and evolution usurps the throne. Never was there more need that college students should be able to feel the strong intellectual grasp and the steadying hand of Christian presidents and professors than now. At Williams, in Arthur Mitchell's time, there was no lack in this respect. The students felt that in President Hopkins they had as their champion an intellectual giant, one who had been over all disputed ground, and whose Christian faith, enlightened and confirmed, was a tonic to their own. He inspired their love for all knowledge, and he led them over his own fields of intellectual and spiritual victory. Dr. Mitchell to the day of his death never ceased to regard Mark Hopkins as the man whose balanced intellectual and moral greatness had remained to him a grand inspiration. He had given sinew and fibre to his convictions of religious truth and had made the kingdom of God seem real and triumphant.

Though having the ministry steadily in view, young Mitchell spent a year or two as a tutor in Lafayette College. He was young enough to wait, and the intellectual discipline of teaching was of permanent value. To this was added the further advantage of travel. With his intimate col-

lege friend, Charles A. Stoddard, now editor of the *New York Observer*, he made an extensive tour in the Levant, visiting not only the scenes of Bible history, but also the mission stations of Egypt and Syria. It is easy to see how this personal observation of practical missionary life and work found its uses in his subsequent career. He knew how to picture the moral desolation of non-Christian lands as only one can who has been an eye-witness.

At Union Theological Seminary, New York, where Mr. Mitchell sought his special preparation for the ministry, he combined study with Christian activity, as he had done in college, though in a different way. Sunday-school work, revival work, where opportunity offered, and all forms of aggressive usefulness enlisted his attention, and the influence which he exerted on his fellow-students was both attractive and spiritually helpful. One who was a fellow-student at that time has said of him : " His companionship was then, as ever after, stimulating and uplifting. Through all these years my affection and admiration for him have continued. Without reservation, I say I have never known a more earnest and consecrated spirit than his." He was fond of singing, and while in the seminary he was at one time leader of the choir in the Fourth Avenue Presbyterian Church, then under the pastorate of Rev. Dr. Joel Parker. He has often spoken in later years of the deep impression made on him during his seminary course by the exemplary faith and piety of the venerable Professor Dr. Thomas H. Skinner. Here again, as at college, he was fortunate in receiving a type of instruction deeply characterized by spiritual stimulus. He had sat at the feet of some of the most eminent Christian teachers of the age, and he never ceased to feel the power of their personality.

Soon after graduating, in 1859, he was married to Miss Harriet E., daughter of the late Dr. Alfred Post, of New York, and about the same time he accepted a call to the pastorate of a Presbyterian church in Richmond, Va. He was still but twenty-four years old, but he soon won the full confidence of his congregation and of the community. One of his earliest discourses was what he was pleased to call his " filthy rag " sermon. Using for his text this homely simile, by which Paul sets forth the low value of human righteousness, he brought out the very pith and marrow of the Gospel with such clearness and force, that wherever he preached that sermon it was so commended by the best judges that he became more and more convinced that in selecting the great common truths of the Gospel he had struck the right vein—right in itself and right as a means to success. He believed that those discourses which bear directly upon personal faith and repentance and a godly life are what the people need and what they really desire. Without laying claim to remarkable talent in any one direction, he yet became a powerful preacher by his rare combination of intellectual, with the highest moral elements. The conscientious study and preparation, the enthusiasm with which the truth filled his mind, the manifest sincerity and depth of his own convictions, the sym-
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thetic voice and manner, the illuminated face, the loving, winning, pleading expression of the whole man—all this combined to make him a very effective preacher. And he was nowhere so effective as among his own people, who, knowing him as a pastor, credited his every word with the emphasis of his godly life. At Richmond the prosperity with which his ministry was attended was soon interrupted by the breaking out of the war. When Virginia decided to join in the Secession, Dr. Mitchell, like so many others, found himself under the necessity of deciding on which side of the breach to stand. Feeling that his true sphere was in the North, he first conveyed his family across the lines, reaching the Union army just as it was entering Baltimore, on that famous April 19th, 1861, when its passage toward Washington was resisted by the citizens. Sending the family homeward, he returned to his people, but, as it proved, not for long. The issues of war were all absorbing and unrelenting. He was not the man to belie his convictions, and the public sentiment soon reached a point where all compromise was impossible, and the usefulness of the young Northern pastor was crippled. He succeeded in getting through the lines, though not without considerable peril. The Confederate Government confiscated nearly all his household goods, but this did not prevent him from visiting his old flock at the close of the war or from contributing for the wants of some former parishioners whom the war had impoverished.

In the Richmond congregation, perhaps the most marked improvement wrought by his influence was the great increase of missionary interest. He thoroughly organized the missionary contributions of the congregation, increasing the total many fold. In his next charge, which was the Second Presbyterian Church of Morristown, N. J., the same result followed. There was no unwise disproportion in his preaching, though he doubtless felt that the world's complete redemption was broad enough and sublime enough to be safely made a hobby. He gave a hearty support to every other form of benevolence, and he aimed in his preaching to win the unconverted and to strengthen believers. As a pastor he was well-nigh a model. Sympathetic, affectionate, faithful, consistent, laboring in season and out of season, he won the love of his people, at the same time that he spurred them to ever higher degrees of self-denying effort for the perishing.

In 1868 he was called from Morristown to the First Presbyterian Church in Chicago. He was yet a young man for such a charge, but he soon rose to commanding influence both in his congregation and throughout the city. His preaching was characterized by great plainness and fidelity; sometimes it was too plain and searching for the worldly-minded to approve, yet all cherished toward him such profound respect for his sincere earnestness and his manifest love for his people that none refused to listen. His ideas of the cause of foreign missions were a surprise to many; the measure of duty which he laid on every man's conscience with respect to the far-off heathen seemed preposterous at first to not a few.

There are in every community what are called "hard-headed business men," who are too wise to invest their money in "castles in Spain," much less in Africa or the islands of the sea. By way of pretext, they "believe in doing the missionary work that is nearer home," while in reality they do nothing of the sort. But when one, like this Chicago pastor, really girds up his loins for the task of convincing such a class of hearers, when he marshals great masses of facts, appeals to the Bible—Christ's own words; appeals to history—the history of our own once heathen ancestors; shows that all the best civilization is the result of missions; points out the stations which already dot the sea-coasts of the world; arrays the Christian denominations now engaged with one mind and heart in a common cause, and shows how many of every kindred and tribe and tongue have responded to the messages of the Gospel—when he does this not once a year, and perfunctorily, but often, and with all the fervor of his own heart, something very positive must follow. Reluctant hearers will either become convinced, and will recast their personal notions of duty, or they will find a place where conscience may slumber more peacefully. And a church under such leadership will either become a missionary church, or it will find a different pastor. Almost invariably the better alternative is chosen.

More than once when Dr. Mitchell preached on missions, whether in his own or another's pulpit, some man or woman came forward, and acknowledging a new and broader conversion, made amends for past neglect by a generous and sometimes a very large contribution to the cause.

An incident occurred at a later date which well illustrates the way in which his piquant and forcible way of putting things impressed business men. He was pleading for a particular mission in the East for which a missionary was ready to be sent, but was delayed for want of funds. He became so wrought up as he thought of the great wealth and luxurious equipages of some of his hearers, that, as a sort of climax, he said: "Why, some of you drive a missionary down-town every morning as you go to business." This startling view of the case had its effect; one interested capitalist leaned over to another and said: "Let us unite in sending that missionary." And it was done.

But it must not be supposed that Dr. Mitchell's harp was an instrument of one string only. He saw also the moral desolations of Chicago, as well as those on another hemisphere. He loved to preach to the classes who were not attendants at any church, and he finally made arrangements for stated preaching to the neglected or, perhaps, I should say, the self-neglectful classes. He was also too much of a patriot not to be deeply interested in all departments of home missionary work on the frontiers. He understood the symmetry and proportion and the full and rounded integrity of that great commission of our Lord when He said: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." If he placed special emphasis upon the "uttermost part," it was only because the vast majority of Christians

give it no emphasis at all. He shared Paul's interest in "the regions beyond" and for the same reason.

As a preacher Dr. Mitchell had peculiar power with worldly men, all the more that his honest fidelity was backed by a blameless and consecrated life. To those who were sincere, though perhaps struggling Christians, there was something refreshing and uplifting in getting away from the toil and care and ceaseless grind of their secular life and listening one day in the week to a devout and unworldly man who made God and heaven seem real and present. Within the sanctuary and within the sound of that earnest and sympathetic voice there was such a contrast to the wild, rushing, money-making Chicago that was without! In personal intercourse with him the effect was the same. One thoughtful parishioner said, after talking with him: "Arthur Mitchell is a saint." A friend who had known him both as a preacher and in some business matters recently said of him: "He was to me one of the most attractive and even fascinating saints of God that I have ever met. . . . Every clerk in my office knew from his business letters that he was one of God's gentlemen. He was much more, though, for he was an earnest, able, and magnetic preacher of Jesus Christ, and an efficient, broad-minded, and executive man of affairs in all church work."

Gentleness was a conspicuous element in Dr. Mitchell's character. The late Dr. Musgrave, in speaking of him in the General Assembly, which met in the First Presbyterian Church in Chicago in 1871, alluded to him as "the gentle Prince Arthur." And yet there was another side of his character which was brought out in certain emergencies. When there was a great wrong to fight down he had the courage of a lion. Small and modest man that he was, his spirit rose when truth and humanity were at stake to the stature of Goliath. There was a time in Chicago when an election had been carried by the most unblushing frauds. Men hung their heads in shame for Chicago, but were helpless and hopeless. But with Dr. Mitchell it was enough that heaven had been insulted and that the justice of heaven was on his side. The wrong could not stand. The eternal fitness of things was against it, and therefore he was against it. He was not in politics, he was acting for no party, but he gave his whole strength to the cause of honest government. Fearing the manipulation of the votes which had been cast, he went at midnight to watch the precinct, and his testimony of what he saw led to a new election. Mr. Donald Fletcher, in a recent letter, while alluding to this incident, says: "Of all men whom I have ever known, he stood the embodiment of the Christ spirit. I shall never forget how, on my congratulating him years ago on having, single-handed, overthrown an election that had been carried by fraud, a new one having been ordered by the authorities, he said he was 'glad to illustrate that a minister was not necessarily silly or helpless.' How grandly he combined the gentle and the courageous!"

In 1880 Dr. Mitchell removed from Chicago to Cleveland, where he became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church. His record there also

was that of a faithful and earnest preacher and a pastor loving and beloved. There he won the same distinction as an advocate of foreign missions. It had long been felt throughout the Church that he was specially fitted for the sphere of secretary of the Foreign Board. He had indeed been offered the position as early as 1870, though he did not then see his way clear to accept it. *The Interior* had strongly advocated his election ere he left Chicago. And when, in 1885, he was again offered the position he accepted, and thenceforth gave himself wholly to the cause which he so much loved. For nearly eight years was he permitted to stand between the field missionaries and the home churches, encouraging the one and pleading for the prayer and sympathy and support of the other. Three years before his death he visited the mission fields of the East, and brought back deepened impressions of the wants and woes of the nations that know not Christ. Unfortunately, also, he returned to his post with impaired health. He had never learned to measure aright his powers of endurance. To visit missions may become the most wearing of all services, and Dr. Mitchell, when filled with a high purpose, a very fire in his bones, knew not how to heed a warning. At Nanking, while preaching from a manuscript, he became blind ; he could no longer read the pages before him. Nevertheless, he kept on, and extemporized the remainder of his discourse. Soon after, at Bangkok, while discussing missionary matters with one of the brethren, he again became blind. Still he kept on, addressing an auditor whom he could no longer see, till finally he sank to the floor not only blind but speechless and with one side of his face paralyzed. Such was the indefatigable spirit of the man. It is not too much to say that he was even morbidly conscientious where a supposed duty demanded his self-sacrifice. On his return, still weak and unfit for service, he was granted a three months' leave of absence for rest, but his strength was never fully recovered. He felt even more strongly than he had often felt before that the position which he held was too hard for his powers of endurance, and yet, when opportunities came, as they had come before, to accept an easier sphere, he dared not turn aside from his great and beloved work. Sometimes he had reached the deliberate choice of a shorter course rather than live longer in some other work. In the spring of 1892 he took another respite of three months, but it soon became evident that fatal disease had fastened itself upon him. After leaving for Florida in the following November he failed rapidly, though scarcely himself realizing that his work was done. Up to the very time of his collapse, in November, he retained all his matchless eloquence in pleading for missions. Perhaps the very grandest effort that he ever put forth was made in a speech of over an hour before the Synod of New York, convened at Albany. Dr. John G. Paton, the hero of the New Hebrides, who happened to be present, spoke of it as the most remarkable missionary address that he had ever heard. It shook the Synod like a tempest ; but alas ! it shook also the frail body of the speaker. He wrote me afterward from Florida that he had " never been the same man after that night." It was a worthy farewell plea before the

Church and the Christian world to remember the nations that have waited so many centuries for the truth.

Much might be said of the relations which Dr. Mitchell bore to his colleagues as a secretary and to the Board. He enjoyed the perfect confidence and the love of all. Never was there a truer man, seldom a more faithful servant of Christ. In the Divine economy nothing is lost, and the world is permanently better for this life of Arthur Mitchell.
